Independent Reading Post: 4/Semester: 1

The Alchemist

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This section of reading leads up to the climax, and continues Santiago’s journey. In this section of the reading, Santiago read the flight of the birds, which is an omen. It meant that there was an attack coming to the oasis; a very serious matter. Santiago then tells the caravan leader about this, who then instructs Santiago to tell the Council of Elders. Santiago then has a meeting with the elders, announcing his reading. The Head Council Member says that the oasis members will use arms (guns) but “If at least one of them hasn’t been used by the end of the day tomorrow, one will be used on you” (Coelho 108). This statement really made Santiago scared, because should he read the signs wrong, he would be killed. The thought of death at first frightened Santiago, but he realized that if he died tomorrow, it was no different than dying years from now. The story then progresses to Santiago making his way into the desert. These small trips into the deserted desert make Santiago feel better, and remember his place in the world. While in the desert, a valiant white horse with a hooded rider appeared in front of Santiago. Nearly taking Santiago out, the masked marauder talks to Santiago about personal legends and the Soul of the World. Santiago learns that this mysterious man is an Alchemist. The two part ways until they would meet again. An attack was launched toward the oasis, proving Santiago’s prophecy. The Elders then granted Santiago the title of Counselor of the Oasis, a very prestigious title.

Santiago meets the Alchemist again, and the two go back to the Alchemist’s tent. Santiago realizes how bad he wants to achieve his personal legend of getting the treasure, but doesn’t want to abandon his “girlfriend,” Fatima. But the Alchemist reassured Santiago’s dream. He set up a scenario that if you put your dream on hold, it would never come to be, since you will always put obstacles before it. Santiago gains courage, a much-needed human characteristic. Santiago says goodbye to Fatima, and leaves at dawn with the Alchemist to venture toward the Pyramids. The two cross the desert for many nights. The section ends with the two adventurers gazing at the Pyramids in the distance.

This section of the book really touched my heart. Santiago was about to abandon his dream of finding the treasure due to priorities back at the oasis. He was thinking of others, rather than thinking about what was best for himself. Like Santiago, I have a dream. I want to go to Harvard College. It has been my dream for as long as I can remember, and it seems like everyday I move forward, I get closer and closer to this dream. However, there are many “issues” that may surface going to Harvard. Such as weather, not seeing family as often, a challenging load of work every day. However, those are all by products of the dream. I sit all of the negative feelings aside because I yearn for Harvard. I want my name on a Certificate from Harvard. I am willing to give up everything for my dream, just like Santiago. This grouping of pages emphasized personal legends or your mark on the world through your own achievements. Courage seems to be the most important feeling needed to achieve personal legends. These legends may seem unobtainable, but little things like courage, perseverance, pride, and hard work help you get there. This book truly has opened my eyes to goals and the process of achieving them.

The essential question of what human characteristic spans time and culture was truly answered in this section of the reading. One characteristic is willingness to risk it all. Santiago gave up sheepherding, working at the crystal shop, and even his love to find this treasure. It makes sense that in order to advance or move forward, we must be willing to go to the edge of the precipice. What’s life without a little risk? Another characteristic would be courage. Being brave isn’t putting on a face. It isn’t a temporary fix. Bravery is a state of mind, which helps you set aside fear, and put your money where your mouth is. Santiago needed to be brave to venture out into the desert with the Alchemist. There was a tribal war going on in the sands of the desert. That could have been an excuse for Santiago to not venture out to find his treasure. Yet, he was brave, and galloped through the sands on his mighty steed. When the two marauders stopped the Alchemist and Santiago to search them, the two could have cowered in fear, but they were brave, fooling the thieves.

This section helps the reader understand human nature through the psychological and spiritual aspects. First, psychological aspects were used when the thieves were trying to steal from the Alchemist and Santiago. The thief pulled out some of the Alchemist’s potion and the Philosopher’s stone. He asked what the items were and the Alchemist told him exactly what it was. Confused and amused, the thief left the two alone because it thought the Alchemist was being funny. This psychological maneuver created by the Alchemist not only saved the two adventurers, but the Alchemist’s items too. It just goes to show you that honesty really is the best policy because it could save your butt. This shows us that human nature is serious until we don’t take someone or something seriously. The other aspect was spiritual. Santiago and the Alchemist firmly believe in the Soul of the World and the Languages of the World. These spiritual beliefs push the characters forward because they want to learn about the world and it’s inhabitants. While this may be a shock to some, by understanding the language and soul of the world, one can understand themselves better. Why? Because if you know where you came from, you know where to go. Santiago is truly gifted at reading the language of the world. It is the unspoken language. The interaction between the world and others is the definition of the world.

To understand human roles and behaviors, this section outlines how humans think. The most emphasized aspect was achieving your goals, and doing everything in your power to achieve said goals. For example, Santiago gave everything up to find the treasure. Will it be worth it? Whether he finds a sumptuous treasure or not, the adventure itself is a treasure all in it’s own. Humans naturally think of themselves first (unless a totalitarian society states otherwise). Humans should because you are your own worst enemy. We all put ourselves down when we don’t get a one-hundred on a paper or disappoint a teacher. Shouldn’t we reward ourselves every once and a while? We should. Many women during World War II sat all of their dreams aside to work in factories to help produce ammunition or supplies for war. Even today, men and women alike sit their dreams and goals aside because something comes up, and then something else comes up until they are buried beneath a pile of work or kids that ruin the dream. The Alchemist spoke of this very wisely. “You must understand that live never keeps a man from pursuing his Personal Legend. If he abandons that pursuit, it’s because it wasn’t true love…the love that speaks the Language of the World” (Coelho 120).

Finally, the section read helps us understand human ideals. The Alchemist clearly laid all important human ideals on the table. Santiago looked at the ideals including seeking the signs of the world, or the language of the world, or whatever it may be. If one doesn’t understand their ideals, how can they move forward? This phenomenon perplexed many scholars today. Since humans are so busy, they fail to remember how they got to their position. We should focus on today because we don’t know what tomorrow will bring. This was emphasized in the novel because Santiago was so concerned about what is going to happen tomorrow, he failed to realized that today was wonderful. As a teacher once said, “Try. Fail. Adjust.” (Shive).